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TODAY'S FOCUS: WHEN REBELS WANT GUNS, WHAT'S AN AMERICAN TO DO?
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WASHINGTON

Dominick Spadea says he is not sure how Afghanistan's anti-Soviet rebels found out about the submachine pistol his company makes.

He does know that the guerrillas dangled big money before his 5-year-old firm: a potential \$10 million contract.

So when the deal developed snags, Spadea approached the staff of Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J.

It was a complex problem that ultimately included the Central Intelligence Agency, the State Department, the Senate Foreign Relations and Intelligence committees, a gun lobbyist and an organization representing the Afghan insurgents.

The predicament thrust the unwitting Spadea and his Jersey Arms Works of Westmont, N.J., into the knotty terrain of covert American aid and Soviet-American-Pakistani relations.

"I'm a businessman and I want to make a sale," said Spadea. "There are many ideologies and political considerations in this, and I want to avoid that. All we want to do is find out if our government will approve a bonafide sale to the rebels."

Spadea says he simply wanted to sell thousands of the concealable machine guns he manufactures directly to the anti-communist Afghan fighters.

In August, the State Department _ following government policy that bars overt military aid to the rebels _ told him no.

The guerrillas, who have been fighting the Soviets since their 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, receive covert military aid from the United States and other countries, most of it clandestinely funneled through neighboring Pakistan.

Government officials will not publicly discuss that assistance, or even acknowledge that it exists. But it is a system that sources say involves hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

"To ask for an overt program is to ask Pakistan to declare war on Afghanistan," said Paul Young, aide to Sen. Gordon Humphrey, R-N.H., who has sought increased assistance to the rebels. "Right now, we deny we have a covert program and Pakistan denies that they are helping."

Spadea had other concerns.

His firm developed the S-7 Avenger submachine pistol, a .45-caliber, lightweight weapon that can empty its 30-round clip in two seconds. It retails for \$369.

But because they are considered machine guns, it has been hard to sell them in the United States, where automatic weapons are tightly regulated.

Hence, he sought customers overseas.

Late this summer, he says he heard that the Afghan resistance movement wanted to purchase thousands of the guns.

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